

REMARKS

Initially, Applicant would like to thank the Examiner for indicating the allowability of the subject matter recited in claim 10, if rewritten into independent form to include all of the limitations of base and intervening claims.

In the outstanding Final Official Action, claims 11-12 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) over HODGE (U.S. Patent No. 2,017,247). Claims 8-9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over DIETERICH (U.S. Patent No. 1,449,385) in view of ENDO (JP 3-189021). Claims 8-9 were also rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over TSUJI (U.S. Patent No. 6,606,926) in view of ENDO. Claims 13-14 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over DANIELS (U.S. Patent No. 1,402,284) in view of ENDO. Claim 10 was objected-to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but was otherwise indicated to contain allowable subject matter, if rewritten into independent form to include all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims (i.e., if amended to include all of the features of claims 8-9).

Upon entry of the above amendment, claims 8-9 will have been canceled without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter recited therein. Claim 10 will have been amended into independent form to include substantially all of the features previously recited in claims 8-9 from which previous dependent claim 10 depended. Claim 11 will have been amended into dependent form to depend from amended independent claim 10. Claim 12 depends from claim 11. Independent claim 13 will have been amended to include the features recited in previous dependent claim 10, though the term "punch guide" as in previous claim 10 has been replaced with "punch holder" in amended claim 13. Claim 14 depends from amended independent claim 13.

The herein-contained amendments should not be considered an indication of Applicants' acquiescence as to the propriety of any of the outstanding rejections or objection. Rather, the combination of features recited in each of the claims as previously pending is believed to have been allowable, at least because each combination was not disclosed, suggested or rendered obvious by the documents applied in the Final Official Action as set forth in the previous Response filed September 6, 2006. Nevertheless, Applicants have amended the claims in order to obtain early allowance of claims in the present application.

The outstanding rejections of claims 8-9 and 11-12 and objection to claim 10 have been rendered moot by the herein-contained amendments to claims 10 and 11 and the cancellation of claims 8-9. Accordingly, each of amended claims 10-12 is believed to be allowable at least for the reason that the subject matter recited in the combination of previous dependent claim 10 was previously indicated to be allowable. Further, amended independent claim 13 is believed to be allowable at least for reasons similar to the reasons for the allowability of amended independent claim 10. Dependent claim 14 is believed to be allowable at least for depending, directly or indirectly, from an allowable independent claim, as well as for additional reasons related to its own recitations. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of each of the outstanding rejections and objection, and an indication of the allowability of each of the claims now pending.

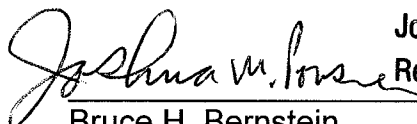
The amendments to the claims which have been made in this amendment, which have not been specifically noted to overcome a rejection based upon the prior art,

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should be considered to have been made for a purpose unrelated to patentability, and no estoppel should be deemed to attach thereto.

Should there be any questions or comments regarding this Response, or the present application, any representative of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office is invited to contact the undersigned at the below-listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,
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